

MENGQI ZHANG

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ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Postdoctoral Fellow

Aug 2025 - Present

Media Forensics Hub and Department of Marketing, Clemson University

EDUCATION

University of Colorado Boulder

2025

Ph.D. in Economics

University of Colorado Boulder

2019

M.A. in Economics

Shanghai Jiao Tong University

2017

Master's Program in Economics

South China University of Technology

2014

B.A. in Economics

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Microeconomic Theory, Industrial Organization, Marketing

WORKING PAPERS

“Persuasion Through Reviewers: Implementation Observability and Commitment”

We study persuasion when a sender communicates through reviewers whose private reporting types map states into signals. The sender garbles information by managing the distribution of these reviewer mappings. When the receiver observes only a coarse statistic of this distribution, the sender can secretly substitute reviewer types within an observational cell. Observability of implementation therefore becomes a commitment problem. This mapping-management perspective structurally characterizes partial commitment and its effect on persuasion. The sender can commit to an information structure only if it lies in the convex hull of the cellwise mappings selected by its own value vector. This characterization turns partial commitment into a geometric admissibility constraint on the sender’s strategies. The constraint impairs persuasion by forcing the sender to choose a suboptimal admissible strategy, or by making the standard-persuasion optimum admissible only at a discounted value. For policy design, the framework indicates which reviewer types should be observable for given objectives, including robustness, rather than treating full transparency as the only benchmark.

“Receiver Inattention and Persuading to be Persuaded”

Frictions in a Bayesian persuasion game, such as the receiver’s rational inattention, can constrain the feasible information structures beyond Bayes’ plausibility. In a conventional persuasion scenario with a binary state and binary action, we examine the properties of the inattention constraint under which the sender is likely to benefit from extending the persuasion game. These properties transform the sender’s persuasion problem into an intertemporal one, where her strategy not only determines the current chance to succeed but also the receiver’s prior belief in the next persuasion attempt, if necessary. In contrast to the optimal static persuasion strategy, the intertemporal approach may lead the sender to adopt a “piecemeal” information disclosure strategy, where she sacrifices the chance of

immediate success to ensure that the receiver can be persuaded in subsequent attempts should her current attempt fail. While extending the persuasion game can improve overall persuasiveness beyond the static efficiency level, frictional constraints continue to define the efficiency limits of this sequential strategy. Friction-free efficiency remains unattainable, even with unlimited opportunities to persuade.

“Price Signal in Conspicuous Consumption”

In conspicuous consumption, if consumers lack information about market demand, they are uncertain about the exclusivity for which they are willing to pay a premium. The price set by a monopolistic firm with an information advantage can be a signal of product exclusivity to consumers. In a signaling game, we show that the consumer’s heuristic, that higher prices justify higher levels of exclusivity, supports the equilibria where prices are pooling or separating signals. In these equilibria, as compared to the perfect-information benchmark, the firm earns a higher profit in the premium luxury market, where most potential consumers are high-type, and a lower profit in the affordable luxury market, where there is a large proportion of low-type consumers. In addition, the difference in consumption value between high- and low-type consumers, as well as consumers’ preference for exclusivity, affect the firm’s profit in imperfect-information equilibria, which generate important managerial implications for product design and marketing strategies.

“Over-Persuasion and Mechanism Design”

In a Bayesian persuasion game, the sender may have to use the same persuasion strategy to persuade a group of receivers. An optimal strategy to persuade targeted receivers may provide unnecessary information to some other receivers with different prior beliefs. Such unnecessary information may change these receivers’ beliefs and actions in ways that the sender does not desire, resulting in over-persuasion. This study investigates when the over-persuasion issue arises and how mechanism design can address it. We propose a mechanism in which contract transfer is contingent on signal realizations. Receivers can accept the contract to process the persuasion signals and pay the transfer, or they can decline it and maintain their prior beliefs. The mechanism exploits confirmation bias, which arises from receivers’ heterogeneous beliefs, to create their heterogeneous incentives to accept the contract. We apply the general theorem to the market with a monopolistic seller and heterogeneous consumers who are uncertain about the product’s value. This application demonstrates an important managerial implication for the optimal pricing of a product trial or demo, which was largely overlooked previously.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

“Clicks and Comments” (with Matthew Murphy)

“Information Acquisition with Pairwise Comparisons”

“Optimal Discretionary Mechanism Enforcement”

“Income Effect and Product Quality in Conspicuous Consumption”

INVITED PRESENTATION

2025

Asia-Pacific Industrial Organization Conference (U of Queensland, Australia)

December

Midwest Theory Conference (Pennsylvania State University, PA)

November

EEA (Bordeaux School of Economics, France)

August

Stony Brook International Conference on Game Theory (Stony Brook University, NY)

July

Department of Economics, Auburn University, Auburn, AL *May*

2024

Midwest Theory Conference (University of Rochester, NY) *October*

Economics Graduate Student Conference (Washington University in St. Louis, MO) *October*

Annual Conference of EARIE (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) *August*

2023

Hong Kong Economic Association Biennial Conference (HKU, Hong Kong) *December*

Midwest Theory Conference (Georgia Institute of Technology, GA) *November*

INFORMS Annual Meeting (Phoenix, AZ) *October*

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor

Intermediate Macroeconomic Theory *Fall 2019*

Teaching Assistant

Intermediate Microeconomic Theory *Spring 2022, Fall 2022*

Introduction to Statistics with Computer Applications *Fall 2023*

Principles of Microeconomics *Spring 2018, Spring 2020 - Fall 2021*

Principles of Macroeconomics *Fall 2017, Fall 2018, Spring 2019, Spring 2023, Spring 2024*

Natural Resource Economics *Fall 2017, Spring 2025*

Advanced Microeconomic Theory *Fall 2015*

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Clemson University Postdoctoral and Early Professional Scholars Travel Grant Award *2025*

CU Boulder Graduate and Professional Student Government Grant *2024*

Sieglinde Talbott Haller Endowed Economics Scholarship *2021*

Paula M. Hildebrandt Economics Graduate Student Support Award *2020*

Morris E. Garnsey Fellowship *2019*

Yordon Prize in Microeconomics *2018*

Robert and Lauri McNown Award *2018*

Bacon Family Fellowship *2017*

SERVICE

Postdoctoral and Early Professional Scholar Advisory Board, Clemson University *2026 - Present*